Reference Basics

Alex Brower | Information Services Director
What is Reference?

Reference

Finding answers and information

Finding the right information

Both in-person and remote
“In a library (physical or virtual), the right to privacy is the right to open inquiry without having the subject of one’s interest examined or scrutinized by others.”

— American Library Association

Libraries are there to facilitate, not monitor, access to information.
Virtual Reference

- Helpful in a pandemic and regular times
- Opens the library to a wider community
- Great tool for ready reference services (because people hate phone calls!)
- Easy to integrate into existing services
  - Text reference
  - Shared email (if multiple staff)
  - Live chat services
Types of Reference Questions

Library Specific
- When is storytime?
- How do I get a library card?

Ready Reference
- What is the phone number for the American Printing House for the Blind?
- Who is my Congressperson?

Research Questions
- Could you help me trace my family tree? My grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. F. Carson from Possumneck.
- I’m writing a paper and I need scholarly sources about tragic romance in literature.
Medical and Legal Questions

Do not attempt to interpret information. You are not a doctor or a lawyer.

Does your library have a policy?

MLC’s legal statement:

“Please note that I am not a lawyer. All information I have enclosed is simply for your informational use. I cannot give legal advice; I can only provide information from sources available to me through the state government and the Mississippi Library Commission.

Please let me know if you have further questions. Thank you for using the Mississippi Library Commission as a source of information.”
# Reference Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing</td>
<td>Establish rapport with the patron. Look approachable! Ask if people need help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negotiating</td>
<td>Ask open-ended questions, but don’t explicitly ask why they need that information. Paraphrase the question.</td>
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<td>Developing</td>
<td>Develop a search strategy and communicate it to the patron. Use “we” language. Which sources would be best?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locating</td>
<td>Locate and evaluate information. Check and make sure that what you have is what your patron needs.</td>
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<td>Ensuring</td>
<td>Ensure that your patron’s question is fully answered.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>Close the interview without making the patron feel dismissed. Invite them to come again!</td>
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Types of Sources

Books/Print
Best for deeper dives or historical information.

Databases
Best for scholarly articles and specialized information (e.g.: MAGNOLIA.)

Internet/Digital
Best for quick facts, news, pop culture, and government publications.
Databases

- Online and subscription databases
- Digitized reference materials
- Broad or narrow focus
  - Helpful for current topics that may not be published in books (ex. new medical treatments)
Database Searching

- Full-text
- Date range
- Scholarly source?
- Boolean operators
**Boolean Operators**

**AND**: All the given terms must be found, narrows a search.

Witches AND Wizards

**NOT**: Eliminates all terms that follow it; narrows a search. Useful when you need a specific aspect of a topic.

Rabbits NOT Hares

**OR**: Searches any of the terms connected to it; broadens search. Helpful if searching for synonyms.

Car OR Vehicle

- Car
- Vehicle
- Witches
- Wizards
- Rabbits
- Hares
MLC’s Subscription Databases

Demographics Now
Business database containing detailed demographics estimates, consumer expenditures, and retail sales information customizable by state, county, city, zip. Can be used to gather information for business or grant-seeking purposes.

Heritage Quest
Genealogical database (similar to Ancestry) that contains not only census information, but also articles from historical journals and information from the Freedman’s Bank.

Novelist Plus
The complete readers’ advisory solution, empowers librarians, engages readers and connects communities. This database is a readers’ advisory tool for both fiction and nonfiction titles.

Sanborn Maps
Digital versions of historical fire insurance maps.
Types of Internet Sources

- Government information
- Ready reference
- Genealogical sites
- Online databases

*List from ALA* (double check that they work)
Searching the Internet

▸ Which search engine should you use?
  ▸ General search engine: Google, Yahoo
  ▸ Academic search engine: Google Scholar

▸ Start with blanket terms and narrow down.

▸ Think about alternate spellings.

▸ Give context!
  ▸ Ex. If you’re looking for information about Prince, search “Prince AND artist” or even “artist formally known as Prince”

▸ Try using Boolean operators.
Evaluating Internet Sources

- Was the website linked from a trusted source?
- Untrustworthy until proven authoritative
- Is the author known in their field?
- If it looks sketchy, it’s probably sketchy. Go with your gut!
- Does a known organization sponsor or run the site?
- Currency of website or copyright date
- Typos?
Tidbits & Gems
Secrets to “Ref-cellence”

Practice!

Create templates for remote requests (chat, text, email, etc.)

Look up weird stuff you’re into.

Create finding aids or resource lists for common questions

Talk to your coworkers when finding an answer.

Practice more!
Still Can’t Find an Answer?

Forward us your weirdos!

MLC Reference Desk

- **Phone**: 601–432–4492  *or* 1–877–594–5733
- **Text**: 601–208–0868
- **Email**: mlcref@mlc.lib.ms.us
Activity

Use the following link to complete a choose-your-own adventure type reference request:

https://www.inklewriter.com/stories/77649

Once each group has completed their stories, discuss the results and why you made the choices you did. Do you feel more familiar with the reference interview process?
Projects

1. List of resources available in the community

2. List of answers and sources for frequently asked questions

3. Instructions on databases your library has
Any questions?

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